

ALFREDO PIATTI

MORTON LATHAM













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*Alfred Piatti*

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES H. H. H.

# Alfredo Piatti.

A Sketch,

By

Morton Latham.



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## PREFACE.



In this imperfect sketch I have sought not to write a mere panegyric of one whose face was for half a century familiar in English musical circles, whose tones will ever live in the memory of those whom they once enthralled, and who was beloved by all who knew him. Mere laudatory phrases are out of place in the biography of a great artist; they are without interest to those who have not heard him play and superfluous to those who have. I have hoped rather to depict *the man* to those who only knew *the artist*.

All the varied incidents of an active life which are here narrated I have heard from the lips of Signor Piatti himself, and he kindly revised many of these pages before they were put into the publisher's hands. I have also to thank for information supplied to me, Messrs. Hill, Mr. F. C. Pawle, who has kindly also allowed the portrait by Holl to be reproduced in this volume, and most of all the Contessa Rosa Piatti-Lochis.

MORTON LATHAM.

July, 1901.



# ALFREDO PIATTI.

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## CHAPTER I.

### EARLY LIFE AT BERGAMO.

ON one of the southern spurs of the Alps, overlooking the wide plain of Lombardy, towards the Appenines in the south, and with the soft tints of Monte Rosa in the west, at a height of some twelve hundred feet above the sea stands the city of Bergamo; a city, the origin of which dates from before the foundation of Rome, and which to this day contains one or two towers, which are of Roman, if not of earlier construction; a city, so ancient that its present name Bergamo, or as it is pronounced in the local *patois* "Bergham," being probably derived from the German Berg-

heim at the time of the Lombard occupation of Northern Italy, seems to be but a record of modern history.

The city itself is divided into two parts, the lower town on the level of the plain and the older upper town some 250 feet higher, now connected with the lower town by steep streets, in which are the palaces of the old local nobility, and, modern innovation, by a *funiculi* railway. The fortifications erected when Bergamo was a frontier city of the Venetian republic, still surround the old upper town, in the centre of which is the public square where stand the buildings which once contained the seat of government, also the cathedral, and by its side the far more important civic church of Santa Maria Maggiore, reminding us of such free towns as Lubeck, where the merchants determined to have, and did have, a bigger and a finer church than that of the Bishop.

It was in this city that in 1801 Antonio Piatti was born, he was connected with

a musical family and was by profession a violin player, in which capacity he led the orchestra in Bergamo. His son, speaking of his powers of performance on his instrument, said "My father was "a very good violin player, always in "tune, but perhaps a little cold." Mayr, the conductor at Bergamo, gave Antonio Piatti a certificate that he could play so well as to make the public believe that it was Rovelli, then a recognised artist, who was performing. Whatever may have been his coldness in performance as a violin player there can be no doubt of the warmth of the blood that flowed in his veins, for he was married at the early age of nineteen to Marianna Marchetti, also a native of Bergamo, who was herself only fifteen at the time. The first issue of the marriage was Carlo Alfredo Piatti, who was born on the 8th of January 1822 at a house in the Via Borgo Canale, a quaint old street in the upper town of Bergamo, about three or four doors from the house in which Gaetano



Donizetti had been born. The house faces to the north in the direction of that country which was to be as dear to the great artist as his native land. Poor Alfredo (for we may at once drop the Carlo as Piatti never used it except in some formal documents and not even in his Italian will), did not long enjoy the comfort of a mother's love. She died at the age of seventeen when her second son was born.

The young Alfredo commenced the study of his instrument at the early age of five, and the necessity for work was clearly put to him by his father who told him that if he did not play the violoncello he would have to be a cobbler. The child's master in Bergamo was his great uncle, Zanetti, who was at that time the principal 'cello player in the orchestra of the city, a good performer and a good musician.

For the purpose of his lessons, a viola di gamba by Gaspar di Salo which had been cut to a smaller size, was lent by

the family Baglioni of Bergamo. The instrument still exists in the School of Music of the city a relic of the early days of the artist, who became, in later life, a director of the school, and of whom his native town is justly proud. This viola di gamba the boy had to carry from his father's house to that of his great uncle who also lived in the upper town, and on the way he had to cross the city square where boys were in the habit of playing marbles. The temptation was of course one which no boy could resist, and Alfredo would stand his instrument up in a corner of the square and join in the game. On one occasion during the game he heard a noise, turned round and saw two lads fighting, one of whom finding the viola di gamba a convenient weapon of attack had just struck his opponent on the head with such force that his head had gone right through the back of the instrument. It was of course useless for the boy to proceed to his uncle for a lesson on an instrument in such a state

and there was therefore no course open to him but to return home ; and, on the way, he said many Ave Marias that he might not be thrashed. Thrashed he was all the same. Happily the wounds both of player and instrument were healed with time in the one case and care in the other.

Zanetti was already an old man when he commenced to teach his grand nephew, but Piatti has put on record that his uncle, who used to put his pupil on a chair on the table to receive his lesson, was very patient with him.

The ordinary difficulties of a student of the instrument appear, from his own account, never to have presented themselves to Piatti. And the easy mastery which has astonished more than one generation of musicians seems to have come to him almost naturally.

When Alfredo was seven years old his great uncle applied for permission for him to play with him in the orchestra of the theatre. The child was not to receive

any fixed salary, but his uncle obtained from the Impresario a promise that he would make him a present at the end of the season. In this way Piatti played for three months ; an engagement lasting forty nights. At the end of that time he received a present of ten francs from the Impresario of the theatre ; but his uncle's wife said to her husband "you taught him, therefore you ought to have half the fee," and retained five francs out of the ten. There is no doubt that, even at that early age Piatti's services were worth a better fee than twopence a night for before the commencement of the next season the uncle died, and the boy Alfredo received a regular appointment as his successor in the orchestra of his native city.

When Piatti was thus engaged at the Opera at Bergamo, the chairs were too high for him, and he was therefore seated on the edge of the platform. It was the universal practice in Italy between the acts of the Opera to interpolate

a lengthy Ballet so that the second part of the opera commonly commenced as late as eleven o'clock. For a child such performances were most exhausting. On one occasion while Madame Pasta was singing in *Norma*, in the last scene with Pollione, the air "In mia man al fin tu sei," one of the most touching numbers in the opera, the poor boy, who had fallen asleep, tumbled off his perch and broke his violoncello. Madame Pasta's performance was of course interrupted, but, far from showing any annoyance, she burst out laughing and afterwards generously gave the boy another instrument.

Every evening after the close of the performance Alfredo walked home, from the lower town to the upper town, holding his father's hand and fast asleep the whole way.

Piatti was of course best known to us in England as a quartet player. His quartet playing began at as early an age as his orchestral work. When he was a boy, Bergamo was a very musical town,



and there were three or four families living in it at whose houses quartets used regularly to be played. On one occasion, when he was only six years old, before the death of Zanetti, he went with his uncle to one of these houses, and there heard a quartet, for the first time in his life. The boy looked over his uncle's part. He was surprised to hear people say that it was difficult, as it did not appear to be so to him; so much so that he exclaimed "I should like to play a "quartet." His uncle told him that he was very impertinent, but the master of the house said "Oh, if he likes to play, "let him play"; and Piatti played a quartet of Mozart, the first of his life long series of quartet performances. Later in life Piatti made the acquaintance of two sons of Mozart, of one in Vienna and of the other in Milan, but he said that neither of them displayed any talent for music.

Throughout his life all matters connected with music in his native town were of keen interest to Piatti. There

are many persons of the name of Locatelli living in Bergamo, but Piatti could never discover any who claimed descent from the musician of that name; and even the fact that he was a native of Bergamo appeared to be unknown there and his fame unappreciated. Yet Locatelli was so esteemed in Amsterdam, where the latter part of his life was passed and where he died, that on the day of his funeral almost every shop in that city was closed.

Not the least of the services to music performed by Piatti in later life have been his editions of old music including several of Locatelli's Sonatas. "Locatelli," said Piatti, "must have been a great performer, for some of his music is very difficult, and I think that Paganini learnt much from him."

Piatti remained at Bergamo until he was ten years old. At that time Mayr, who was Maestro di Capella and at the head of the Music School of the city, seems to have had a special fondness for the boy and to have realized his genius.

Mayr produced some seventy operas and a large number of masses, but it must be admitted that he not infrequently took subjects from works, including those of Beethoven, unknown in Bergamo. Mayr died at Bergamo, and on his monument in Santa Maria Maggiore has been engraved a passage from the Kyrie in one of his Masses. Unfortunately the passage thus selected for a lasting memorial is identical with the opening of Beethoven's Trio in C minor.

As an example of Mayr's appreciation of the young artist the following incident which occurred while the boy was in the orchestra of Bergamo may be told.

There was a great festival which lasted three days in the neighbouring village of Caravaggio. Four orchestras were engaged for the occasion, and these orchestras extended all round the church. Mayr conducted his music on the first day of the festival, Coccia on the second day, and Mercadante on the third. On the first day there was an incidental solo

for the violoncello and Merighi, the professor of that instrument at the conservatoire in Milan, naturally expected that it would fall to him to play it. Mayr, however, signalled to the boy Piatti to play the solo.

## CHAPTER II.

## STUDENT LIFE AT MILAN.

IN 1832, at the age of ten, Alfredo Piatti sought admission as a scholar at the Conservatoire at Milan. At his entrance examination Merighi was, perhaps in consequence of the episode at Caravaggio, somewhat prejudiced against the boy, although all the other professors were in his favour. Merighi was however won over by Piatti's playing a work, the authorship of which he did not himself know at the time, and which, as he was already able to play Romberg's music, he considered, to use his own words, "a miserable work." The composition was in fact by Merighi himself, and may for that reason have been astutely selected by the candidate's father. It is also a



curious coincidence that it was dedicated to Mr. Theophilus Burnand an English gentleman who at that time frequently visited Milan and whom in after life Piatti came to know intimately.

As a result, the boy was admitted as a free student or scholar at the Conservatoire, and there he remained five years. The advantage of this scholarship to a lad of humble means will be realized when it is borne in mind that the students were not only educated at the Conservatoire, but boarded and fed there during the whole year.

Vaccaj was the Principal of the School of Music at Milan when young Piatti entered it as a student. He was, according to Piatti, a very good singing master though not much of a musician. He composed several operas, amongst others, "Romeo and Juliet," the last act of which used to be substituted for the last act of Bellini's by Malibran, whenever she sang Bellini's opera.

At that time there were at the Conser-

vatoire twenty-four free students, or scholars, and six paying students. The students, both boys and girls, slept, in separate buildings, at the Conservatoire; and, as they entered there quite young, they received a general education in addition to special instruction in music. Giuseppina Strepponi who afterwards married Verdi was a pupil at the Conservatoire. The students had also duties to perform in connection with the church, and this for the boys included service as acolytes at the altar. On one occasion Piatti had a fight with another acolyte over a candle, with the result that he fell down the steps of the altar and broke his leg. Verdi too as a boy had a not altogether dissimilar accident at the altar.

It appears that there was not much opportunity afforded to the students of orchestral or ensemble playing at the Conservatoire. A fact which will hardly cause astonishment when we know that one of the works put before them for practice was Rossini's Opera "William

Tell" arranged as a quartet.\* There seems really to have been no library worth speaking of at the Conservatoire, and the broad study of music as an art was almost entirely neglected. But for the special study of an instrument the school was particularly favourable, as, by the regulations, each professor was required to give instruction for two hours every day; and, the number of students of each instrument being limited, this meant a considerable amount of personal attention. For instance, Piatti had only one fellow student of the violoncello with whom to divide the two hours instruction devoted to that instrument; and whatever may have been Piatti's opinion of Merighi as a composer, he bore strong testimony to his merits as a teacher of the violoncello, a matter of far greater moment to the subject of this biography.

It was said of Merighi many years

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\* Although "William Tell" was not heard in London till 1839 it was produced in Paris and Milan ten years earlier.

later that he "gave proof of his wisdom and skill in educating that piece of perfection (*quella perfezione*) called Alfredo Piatti."\*

The following story may be told not so much to shew Piatti's views of Merighi's merits as a composer, as the boy's dogged obstinacy in his convictions, the result of his own innate genius for his special instrument.

Merighi on one occasion desired a composition of his own to be played by Piatti at a concert. Piatti felt that the work was as he thought "rubbish," he did not want to play it, and finally cut his finger so as to make it impossible for him to play at all. It is perhaps a pity that there was not at the Conservatoire a rule similar to that in force at the Royal College of Music in London which forbids the performance at a College Concert of any work by a professor of the College.

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\* Grove's Dictionary of Music IV. 766.

On the other hand Piatti was on one occasion required to play a work of his own composition at a concert. He selected some variations on an Air by Paisiello. Merighi objected, but Vaccaj, the principal, directed that it should be played and it was played accordingly and well received. Just before the subject was given out there was a short and insignificant passage for the trumpets. After the performance Merighi said to Piatti "but why did you not tell me of that entry of the trumpets?"

At the Conservatoire the students had only one holiday in each year, and that of a month's duration. It once happened that Vaccaj had gone to Venice to superintend the production there of one of his operas. While he was away one of the students contrived to break into the cellar and to steal the principal's wine, the whole of which was consumed by the students during his absence from Milan.

Vaccaj's opera was a failure and on his return from Venice he went to seek



consolation in his cellar, with the result that he discovered the loss of all his wine. "That year" said Piatti "we had "no holiday."

Piatti's one fellow student on the violoncello was a lad named Storioni. Storioni's grandfather had been an instrument maker and a pupil of Stradivarius, and his father had been professor of the violoncello at the Conservatoire at Milan, and in that capacity the master of Merighi.

Storioni, according to Piatti, played very well, but he was an eccentric character. One of his peculiarities was that every hair that appeared on his face he pulled out. On leaving the Conservatoire at Milan, Storioni got an engagement at Madrid, and he remained in Spain for some time; but when the fighting for the liberation of Italy began, he returned to his own country and was taken prisoner at Rome by the French, and ultimately seems to have been shipped off to England. Piatti was him-

self in London at the time, and one day a servant informed him that a man was at the door who wanted to see him. Piatti went down, and found a man sitting trembling on the doorstep, he looked at him and said, "What, "Storioni!" Piatti took him in and offered him food, to which Storioni's pathetic answer was "No, I must learn "how to live without food." He then told Piatti his story and that on his arrival in England, he had unsuccessfully tried to get into some company of strolling players. It was impossible for Piatti to recommend Storioni, in the deplorable condition in which he then was, for employment in an orchestra; but he helped him with money, and asked him to let him hear of him again. Some time afterwards Storioni appeared at his house in the capacity of a cheesemonger's messenger bringing some cheese which had been ordered by Piatti, after that said Piatti "I lost sight of him."

Among his early recollections Piatti

remembered to have played when he was thirteen at a concert given by Malibran in Milan at the end of September, 1835. During the concert the news of the death of Bellini near Paris on the 23rd of September was announced to the audience. Malibran herself died exactly a year later on September 23rd, 1836.

When Piatti left the Conservatoire at Milan in 1837 at the age of fifteen and a half, he was only in the middle class on account of his youth; but his record is to the effect that he was an excellent pupil in every way. On leaving he played at a public concert of the Conservatoire given in Milan on the 21st September, 1837, a "Concertino" of his own composition; and he received as a prize the instrument on which he performed on this occasion. What part he took in the concert of 1835 does not appear, probably not that of a soloist; and therefore the 21st September 1837 must be regarded as the date of his first appearance as a soloist in a public concert.

The time had now come when his father considered that Alfredo must commence to earn his own living. Piatti therefore returned to Bergamo to take up a permanent engagement in the orchestra of the city. That had been the limit of the father's ambition for himself and that was the limit of his ambition for his son.

## CHAPTER III.

## EARLY PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES.

IT may be that the theatre of a town like Bergamo, where the absence of wealth compelled those who had the direction of the performances to avail themselves of such resources as came readily to hand, afforded to a young man of quick observation, such as Alfredo Piatti was, opportunities of seeing the humourous side of stage life which would never arise in a theatre where wider means enabled the management to ensure perfection of detail in all departments. It may also be that a quick Italian boy of fifteen would see humour which might escape his graver seniors. Certain it is that Piatti had a fund of amusing stories connected with his early life with which

he entertained his friends for many an hour. It would be wearisome to read these, indeed a large part of the charm lay in the skilful telling, but the following story of a misunderstanding is worth recording.

Balfe, the composer and conductor, commenced life as a baritone singer and made his début at Bergamo while Piatti was playing in the orchestra. One night Balfe had to sing in "Olivo e Pasquale." The part was really too low for him, and, as was common in many of the smaller theatres of Italy, the pitch of the orchestra was also low. Balfe at rehearsal complained to the Director of the Theatre "that the orchestra was *troppo basso*." The Director, who in fact knew nothing about music, assured him that he would not find it so for the performance. Carpenters were at once set to work and when the members of the orchestra arrived in the evening they found that all their seats had been raised a foot and a half, which of course made matters all

the worse by bringing the orchestra up between the singer and the audience.

Piatti's work was not confined to orchestral playing in the theatre at Bergamo. He was taken by his father to every town and village in the neighbourhood where there was an opportunity for him to play as a soloist, and he said that he did not think that there was a village in the Province of Bergamo in the church of which he had not played. Among the places visited in this manner was Chiavenna, a town on the shores of Lake Como. The only building that could be found in the town, in which a performance could be given, was a cellar, and that was occupied by some marionette performers; but Antonio Piatti was told that his son might play between the parts of the marionette performance. This he did. The cellar was lighted with oil, in snail shells with wicks floating in the oil, a form of illumination still in use among the peasant children of Italy at small festivities. The marionettes were



played by the brothers Ferni, who were assisted by two young ladies who afterwards became celebrated violinists. If these itinerant performances of the youthful violoncellist were not very lucrative they must at least have served to give him experience and confidence.

It was on one such tour that Piatti found himself without a penny in his pocket at Venice. It was important to him to cross the lagoon and he managed to get on and off the ferry boat without paying a fare. Years afterwards he was introduced to a high dignitary of the church who said "I have met you before." Piatti smiled; "Yes," said the ecclesiastic, "I saw you join and leave the ferry boat in Venice without paying your fare."

After a time these tours were extended beyond the confines of Italy, and the first foreign town to which Piatti was taken by his father was Vienna where he was told that he was to perform, as he understood, between the acts of a play, at the

Kärntherthor Theatre. The work which he selected for the occasion was a Concerto by Romberg. Before the performance he was told that when he went on to the stage he must bow to the king. As there was no king in Vienna Piatti naturally asked "What king?" "The "king of the theatre," was the answer. Piatti went on, made his bow to the king, who with others was sitting on the stage, and played. During the performance the king frequently called out "Bravo, "bravo." It suddenly dawned on Piatti that he was being made to play in the course of a drama, and at the end of the concerto, not being an actor, he made a rush to a door to get off, and found that the door through which he tried to escape was only a painted one in the scenery.

During Piatti's engagement at Bergamo a gentleman came from Turin and stated that owing to the death of the violoncellist there he was sent to offer him an engagement. Piatti accepted the engagement readily under the im-

pression that he was to be the principal violoncellist in the orchestra at Turin, but on his arrival, he found that he was only the eighth, the post of principal being held by Casella. One night Casella came to the theatre in a state of intoxication, the opera was "Rolla" by a young composer named Mabelini of Pistoia, and in it was a solo for the violoncello. The Director of the Opera told Piatti to play the solo; Piatti said, "but my 'cello is but a bad "one." He was told by the Director to take Casella's instrument. Curiously enough some years later Piatti bought this very instrument from Casella's son who had succeeded his father in the orchestra at Turin.

Piatti played the whole season at Turin but his salary was not more than sufficient to maintain him while there and he had to give a concert to earn the money to enable him to leave the town and return home.

For this concert Piatti borrowed a violoncello from his cousin. The instru-

ment though not made by Stradivarius bore a label with his name, and Piatti subsequently bought it for 300 francs. Later he took it to Pavia at a time when Madame Despine was singing there. One day her husband came on the stage and asked to look at the instrument. After doing so he announced that he was himself the maker of it. Piatti subsequently sold the instrument in Piacenza to a gentleman named Castagna. The instrument was so frequently examined by a well known connoisseur in Piacenza that Castagna was induced to think that the instrument was a genuine Strad; and, when he was dying, he advised his wife to consult Piatti about the instrument before parting with it. After his death his widow wrote to Piatti that she had received an offer of 3,000 francs for the violoncello and asking him to come and see her at Piacenza. This he did, and on opening the case he found inside it a Tourte bow which he had himself by mistake left in the case when he sold the

bass to Castagna. This bow he bought back from the widow, who had refused the 3,000 francs. The offer was then increased to 5,000 francs which was accepted. The dealer who thus acquired the instrument sold it making doubtless a very handsome profit. Some years later Piatti received a letter from a lady informing him that her husband had died and that, among his effects was a violoncello bought at Piacenza on which she wished to have his opinion, and enclosing a photograph of the violoncello, from which Piatti recognized that it was the instrument which M. Despine had stated that he had made. The lady asked Piatti to sign a declaration that the violoncello was not made by Stradivarius, but this he was not prepared to do. Subsequently Piatti received a letter from a gentleman in Milan stating that he had bought a Stradivarius violoncello which had come from Piacenza and on which he would like to have Piatti's opinion. Piatti went with Signor

Bisiach, an instrument maker of Milan, to see the violoncello and found that it was the instrument which he had sold for 300 francs. Later Signor Bisiach heard that there was a Stradivarius violoncello in Tyrol. He went to see it and found it to be the same instrument. Still later Piatti got a letter informing him that there was at Trieste a Stradivarius violoncello which had once been in his possession. He was unable to go and see it himself, but Mr. Alfred Hill saw the instrument and was able to satisfy Piatti of its identity with the instrument which he had sold in Piacenza.

Piatti's engagement at Bergamo came to an end under the following circumstances. He unexpectedly received an offer of an engagement at Milan with an intimation that he must come at once if he accepted it. There was not time for him to comply with the usual formality of obtaining regular leave of absence on a form which had to be countersigned by the authorities of the Chapel for which

he was engaged. He therefore sent in his application and left for Milan feeling sure that the leave would be granted. He was not a little mortified when he received, in lieu of the expected permission, notice of dismissal signed not only by the authorities, but also by his friend Mayr the Maestro di Capella. Mayr however afterwards explained that his dismissal was the best thing that could have happened to him as otherwise he would have stuck in Bergamo for ever and would never have done anything in the world.

After the conclusion of his engagement at Milan, Piatti went to give concerts in various towns in and out of Italy. One of the most distant spots visited in this way was Pesth, and there he fell ill. He had no reserve of funds to help him in such an emergency and he was at last obliged to sell his violoncello. Finally a friend from Bergamo, knowing that he was without means, came to bring him home. On their way, they passed through

Munich where, going up the stairs of an hotel, Piatti, hearing a pianoforte being played, said, "If that is not Liszt I do not know who it is." Standing at the door of the room was an Italian gentleman who seemed surprised at Piatti's remark, as well as pleased. This gentleman was Liszt's secretary, Belloni. He took Piatti into the room and told the great pianist how his touch had been recognised. Piatti explained his circumstances to Liszt who said "I am going to give a concert at the theatre for the poor of the town, it would be a good opportunity for you to play." Piatti said, "I should be delighted but I have no 'cello; however I know Menter, and will ask him to lend me one." The Menter referred to was the principal violoncellist in Munich and the father of the well-known pianist, Fräulein Sophie Menter. Piatti played with great success, he was re-called three times and finally Liszt came on to the stage and embraced him. Afterwards Liszt said "You must



"come to Paris, I am going there; you must give a concert and I will play for you." Thus encouraged, Piatti went to Paris in 1844 and it was there that he composed his "Chant Religieux" being at the time without an instrument, practically without funds, for he arrived in Paris with only £5 in his pocket, and, as he felt, almost without friends.

He gave his concert at Paris and borrowed an instrument from an amateur for the occasion. Liszt excused himself from playing saying "I cannot play for you as there are so many artists for whom I should have to do the same thing." Liszt however, who was always kind to young artists, instead of playing gave Piatti a violoncello by Amati. This violoncello had some strange adventures afterwards. On one occasion Piatti was travelling by sleigh in Russia. It appears that the sleigh was badly constructed, the runners being too near together, and the result was that both the violoncello and its owner were upset several times.

By good fortune neither of them sustained any serious injury. The violoncello was a large one, so Piatti afterwards sold it, and it is now in the possession of Canon Pemberton.

Piatti told a characteristic story of Liszt when he played with Ole Bull at the old Hanover Square Rooms, which, after having been converted into a club, were pulled down in 1901. They played the Kreutzer Sonata, and Liszt was rather jealous of the amount of applause bestowed upon the violinist. After one of the variations, the applause was so great that the variation was repeated. Ole Bull played it the second time in octaves and the applause was redoubled; so Liszt, very vexed, turned to him and said, "now play it in thirds" which it is hardly necessary to explain would have been impossible on the violin, though easy on the piano.

Ole Bull used a bow of unusual length. He once recommended Wieniawski to adopt a similar model. Wieniawski an-

swered "What's the good of it? you  
"never use more than half."

While in Paris, Piatti played at a party given by an English lady, Miss Stuard, who was one of the contributors to the "Revue des Deux Mondes," and his "Sonnambula" was written for the occasion.

In Paris Piatti came in contact with Habeneck, the conductor at the Opera, and heard from him the following account of Paganini's first appearance in public in Paris. Paganini was not in the habit of taking any pains at rehearsal. The result was that the orchestra pooh-poohed his playing as that of a charlatan. The work was his own concerto called "La clochette." The introduction was played by the orchestra and Paganini only came on to the stage just before the entry of the solo instrument. The performance however was so remarkable that, said Habeneck "I jumped on to the stage "and embraced him and cried like a "child."

It was also in Paris, though on a subsequent visit, that Piatti played at a concert which was given by Wieniawski the pianist, a brother of the violinist. Sivori played at the same Concert, and Wieniawski had provided a splendid bouquet for Madame Miolan Carvalho who had promised to sing. At the last moment she wrote that she was prevented by illness from singing. After the concert Sivori's secretary got hold of the bouquet and handed it to Sivori with the words "De la part de la plus jolie femme dans la salle." At this moment Wieniawski appeared and claimed his bouquet.

During the year 1844 Piatti also went to Germany taking with him the Amati violoncello for which he was indebted to the generosity of Liszt. Among other places he visited Ems, and there wrote his "Souvenir d'Ems." Piatti thought himself in love with a young lady, and they both on one occasion took part in an excursion on the river. At one spot

where there were some rapids, through an error of the steersman, the boat was for a short time in some danger. When the anxiety was over the company asked each other what had been uppermost in their thoughts in the moment of peril. When Piatti's turn to answer came he said, "I thought of my bass". Whether it was the effect of this somewhat ungallant answer or not cannot be said, but Piatti did not become engaged to the object of his affections. Perhaps it was as well, for his position at that time would not have justified him in marrying.

## CHAPTER IV.

## FIRST VISIT TO ENGLAND.

THE year 1844 was also eventful as the year in which Piatti paid his first visit to London. On his arrival he was met by an Italian violinist who said "I have got some lessons for you." Piatti was most grateful as he had no income; and the next day he was taken to a private house. In the drawing room he found an old gentleman seated, and a violoncello case stood in the room. Piatti was asked to try the instrument, and while he was playing the old gentleman went to a corner of the room and listened attentively, then to another corner, and then to a third. Piatti's conductor then said, "that will do, put away the 'cello and let us go." It turned out after-

wards that the old gentleman was a prospective purchaser of the instrument and that Piatti had been taken to the house to play because the violinist knew that he would bring out the tone of the instrument better than himself.

Piatti at once obtained an engagement to play in the orchestra at the Opera ; and the first private house in London at which he played was that of Dr. Billing, the medical adviser at the Opera. At this private party Grisi and Rubini sang a duet ; the company talked the whole time but the singers went on. Piatti thought " If they will do that to "them what will they do to me ? " When his turn to perform came he began to play a sonata by Mendelssohn. The audience talked, but Piatti felt that, as Grisi and Rubini had gone on singing, he could not stop playing. Presently servants came in with ices and refreshments and there was a general jingling of glasses added to the hubbub of tongues. This was too much, so in the middle of the

first movement Piatti got up and put his instrument away. Dr. Billing afterwards thanked him for playing, adding "But "what a pity that that piece was so short!"

Piatti's first appearance as a soloist before an English public was at the Annual Grand Morning Concert given by Mrs. Anderson at Her Majesty's Theatre on May 31st 1844.

Mrs. Anderson was pianist to Queen Victoria and to the Queen Dowager, she was the wife of Her Majesty's Master of Music, and she was also notable as the first lady pianist who played at a Philharmonic Concert, having performed Beethoven's Emperor Concerto at a concert of the Society in 1835. In the advertisements of her Annual Concert which were published for eight days in the "Morning Post," the name of Piatti appears only once and that on the day of the concert. The inference is that it was only at the last moment that he was engaged to play.



In the review of the concert in the "Morning Post," which commences with a reference to the fashionable assemblage and to the gay toilettes of the ladies, there is the following criticism of Piatti's performance of a Fantasia.

"Signor Piatti, a violoncello performer from Milan, made a most successful début. He played a fantasia on themes from "Lucia," in construction like most works of this nature. His style resembles that of Servais; and a clear and liquid tone, with great equality all over the board, struck amateurs as being particularly fine. In point of inventiveness, there is nothing to record. He did what has been done before. But his certainty and precision were unerring."

It was at this Concert that Piatti first met Joachim then a boy of thirteen who is described by the critic as "last and least in size of solo performers, although certainly not least in merit."

Piatti's next appearance as a soloist

was at the first of three *Matinées* given at the Hanover Square Rooms by Herr Döhler, the pianist, who had been absent from England for four years. Piatti was afterwards much associated with Herr Döhler both in this country and on the continent. In reviewing this concert, the critic of the "Musical World" said:—"M. Piatti performed a violoncello fantasia in which he displayed as great a command of this instrument as we ever recollect to have heard."

It is also interesting that after this *matinée* a critic in the "Athenæum" wrote that Signor Piatti had "obviously formed his cantabile playing on that of the singers of his own country," while in criticisms, written half a century later, attention has more than once been drawn to the lesson which his cantabile playing was to vocalists.

Piatti's third appearance in public was at a Concert given by Signor Brizzi, a singer, on June 21st. It is well to mention these concerts because it has been

frequently thought that Piatti's first appearance as a soloist was at a Philharmonic Concert.

A Philharmonic Concert was a more important event then than now, and Piatti's first appearance at a concert of the Philharmonic Society took place on June 24th, 1844. At this concert Mendelssohn played Beethoven's Concerto in G almost immediately before Piatti made his appearance. This Concerto was always a favourite with Mendelssohn, and the performance on this occasion was particularly brilliant. It was a severe ordeal for a young man of twenty-two to have to step upon the platform, in the presence of such an audience as would be assembled at a Philharmonic Concert, and just after the greatest and most popular musician of the day, had achieved a brilliant success. When he accepted the engagement Piatti did not know that Mendelssohn would be present; had he known it, it is not improbable that he would not have dared

to accept it. The work which was selected by Piatti for the occasion was a Fantasia by Kummer and, according to the "Musical World," he made a most brilliant "début" and was encored in the last part of his Fantasia. To Piatti, as to most foreigners, English audiences seemed cold at first, until he learned that it was the habit of the nation. They do not seem to have been cold however on this evening for Piatti late in life said that it was the only time that he heard an English audience call out "Bravo" in the middle of a phrase that he was playing. The critic of the "Morning Post" wrote:—"Piatti's magnificent violoncello playing won universal admiration, by the perfection of his tone and his evident command over all the intricacies of the instrument."

The following criticism may be quoted from the report in the "Times" of the Philharmonic Concert:—"Piatti is a masterly player on the violoncello. In tone, which foreign artists generally

“want, he is equal to Lindley in his best days ; his execution is rapid, diversified and certain, and a false note never by any chance is to be heard.” Younger readers may be reminded that it was Lindley who charmed a past generation by his musicianly accompaniments from figured bass to the recitatives in Handel’s oratorios, which are now generally accompanied on a pianoforte, though it must be admitted that the tone of a violoncello and double bass are more in harmony with an eighteenth century composition than is that of a modern pianoforte.

After this concert Moscheles told Piatti that Mendelssohn wanted to play a violoncello Sonata with him. Piatti went to Moscheles’ house, where Mendelssohn was staying, prepared to play his Sonata in B flat, but Mendelssohn said “Oh no,” and produced a new Sonata in D in manuscript. Piatti had in his possession a letter from Mendelssohn expressing his pleasure at and appreciation

of Piatti's performance. Later Mendelssohn commenced the composition of a concerto for violoncello and orchestra expressly for Piatti and completed the first movement. The manuscript of this work was however never found.

This season of the Philharmonic Society was a memorable one, for the first appearance at concerts of the Society of Ernst,\* Sainton and, on May 27th, Joseph Joachim.

Fifty years later at the Grafton Galleries the friends of the two artists, Joachim and Piatti, presented to them an address of congratulation on their English Jubilee. In his reply Piatti said that "in his youth he had heard so much

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\* In Ernst's honour let it be recorded that on June 1st, 1844 he gave a Concert in London with Moscheles; but he was unable through sudden indisposition to appear. His moiety of the profits of the Concert amounted to £74 but, having failed to keep his engagement with the public, instead of retaining this sum he presented it to the Royal Society of Musicians.

“of English hospitality that he had formed  
“a strong desire to make England his  
“home ; but before he could do so he had  
“many ups and downs, especially downs”.  
He then gave an amusing account of the  
concert at which “he made his first ap-  
pearance in London, saying of his own  
performance that “he thought he had  
“played rather well, and was pleased with  
“the impression which he had made, when  
“a little fat boy with ruddy cheeks and a  
“short jacket stepped on to the platform  
“and played the violin in a way which  
“completely cast his own performance  
“into the shade. It was” he said “his  
“good fortune to be much associated with  
“the little boy in after years ; his name  
“was that of his dear friend, the great  
“artist, Joachim.”

After playing at the Philharmonic  
Concert, Piatti played the same year  
at the second and third Matinées given  
by Herr Döhler on July 1st, and July  
12th. On July 1st he took part with  
Sivori and Döhler in the performance

of Beethoven's Trio in C Minor. This was his first public performance of concerted chamber music. He also played his "Chant Religieux," which, as has been mentioned, was composed at Paris in a moment of despondency. On July 12th, he played his own fantasia on airs from Bellini's "Beatrice di Tenda." Although his performance on July 12th was dismissed by the critic of the "Times" in the words "M. Piatti, a violoncellist, new to the English public, played a fantasia very ably," the managers of the concert evidently felt that his name was now an attraction, as, though printed in small type in the advertisement of the first two matinées, it appears in large type in advertisements of the third matinée.

The critic of the "Morning Post" on the other hand wrote enthusiastically of the performance on July 12th:—

"Signor Piatti in a fantasia on themes from "Beatrice di Tenda" had also his triumph. Difficulties, declared to be insuperable, were vanquished by him



“with consummate skill and precision. “He certainly is amazing, his tone “magnificent, and his style excellent. “His resources appear to be inexhaust- “ible; and altogether for variety, it is “the greatest specimen of violoncello “playing that has been heard in this “country.”

Piatti had thus not done badly for a first season. He had played at eight concerts in six weeks during the London season, and it must be remembered that concerts were not so numerous in 1844 as they are now. Moreover he had to compete with other performers on the same instrument who were playing in London at the same time; Lindley, the universal favourite; Haussmann a relative of the Haussmann of to-day; and Offenbach, who is better known now in another capacity, but who was described in the “Times” in 1844 as “a violoncello “player of distinguished merit.”

Piatti always spoke with delight of his first provincial tour in England, which

took place in the autumn of 1844. He had pleasant companions, and he was much taken by the clean appearance of the English sea-side places which he now visited for the first time. Sivori, Döhler, Lablache and his son were of the party, and during part of the tour, a well known baritone, Belletti. Belletti was an excellent vocalist; his first great success was in "Ernani": he also played Figaro well; but he was not of a literary turn of mind. At Stratford-on-Avon the party went to see Shakespeare's house. A woman opened the door and Belletti asked who she was. Frederick Lablache, the son, who was full of fun, said, "Oh, 'don't you know? that's Shakespeare's 'nurse.'" Belletti's admiration for the old woman was immense. So said Piatti.

Belletti had been told that there was danger of arsenic in the colour green. Piatti went to see him once at his rooms in London, and happened to say "What 'nice rooms you have.'" Belletti an-

swered, "I am leaving them, the chairs  
"are green."

A different story connected with the same caretaker at Shakespeare's house may be given here. Piatti at a railway station in Paris saw the tragedian Salvini, whom he did not know personally, in front of him, and involuntarily called out his name. Salvini turned, and Piatti apologized with the result that they travelled together to Italy; and Piatti found the celebrated actor a most agreeable companion. In the course of the journey he told Piatti that the greatest compliment which he had ever received had been from the old woman who acted as custodian of Shakespeare's house. Salvini visited the house with a friend who said to her, "I have brought the  
"greatest living interpreter of Shakes-  
"peare to see you." The woman promptly answered "You don't mean Signor Salvini?"

Piatti's acquaintance with Lablache led to his hearing many amusing stories.

Perhaps younger readers should be reminded that Lablache was a man of immense size. It is said that an Englishman visiting Paris and being desirous to see Tom Thumb in private life, was directed by some practical joker to the house where Lablache lived. He sent in his card and was ushered into the presence of the great man who was sitting with his waistcoat unbuttoned. The Englishman began to apologize, but Lablache entering into the joke said "Yes, yes! I am Tom Pouce in public. "Mais chez moi je me mets à mon aise."

The gentleman who held the post of prompter at Covent Garden was Signor Monterasi, a native of Bergamo, and as big a man as Lablache. In the supper scene of "Don Giovanni," Lablache, in the part of Leporello, moved about the stage trembling and carrying a lighted tallow candle. He always contrived to pour plenty of tallow over Signor Monterasi who in the narrow limits of the promptor's box was unable to escape it.

From England the touring party went to Ireland. At Queenstown it was so rough that, after a voyage from Liverpool which had lasted 24 hours instead of 12, they could not get alongside the quay, so a little boat was sent out to take them ashore. Sivori would not part with his violin, and finally, being a little man, he was taken up bodily, violin and all, and let down kicking into the boat.

In Dublin they found that the programme had been made up without consulting the artists, and among other numbers was a duet by Corelli, to be played by Sivori and Piatti; they had no such duet; however Sivori said, "I have an arrangement of Rossini's duet, "*Mira la bianca luna*." They played it; the subject was a very well known air, but one reviewer mentioned how very fine "that old Corelli was."

Piatti used to tell a story of Vivier, a celebrated horn player who was able to produce on his instrument a chord of four notes at once. He had to leave a Dublin

hotel at an unusually early hour one morning. Before leaving he knocked at the door of a room. The occupant of the room called out "Who are you?" "The barber, sir." "I don't want the barber." Later he knocked again. "Who are you?" "The barber, sir." The occupant replied with an oath "I tell you, I don't want a barber. Go away." Vivier then left the hotel, but before doing so, he told the real barber that he was wanted in number 4. The barber was admitted and got an unexpected thrashing.

A performance of Rossini's "Barbiere" was given in Dublin under the direction of Balfe. The trio "Zitti, zitti, piano, piano" is preceded by a storm which is indicated by the drum alone, the other instruments suggesting the stealthy movements of the actors on the stage. Balfe looked to the drummer for his first entry, but the drum was silent. For the next entry of the drum he looked again, but the drummer was fast asleep. His

neighbours woke him up, he rubbed his eyes and came in vigourously with the drum in "Zitti, zitti." The experiences of his boyhood would have made Piatti sympathise with an artist who fell asleep in the orchestra.

Dublin was the scene of another violoncello adventure. Having to start from the hotel to leave Dublin, and there being a party of four inside the carriage, the case containing Piatti's violoncello, which was a Ruggieri, was put on the top of the conveyance. When they arrived at the station the case was gone, having fallen off on the way. The party went back and found some boys lugging the case along and kicking it. When Piatti opened the case he found that the instrument had suffered no injury. It is wonderful what a violoncello will go through without being hurt, while on the other hand it is sometimes put out of order by a very slight jar.

It was during this visit to Dublin in 1844 that Piatti first saw the violoncello

by Stradivarius which afterwards became his favourite instrument and which was in his possession at the time of his death, and which is now the property of Herr von Mendelssohn. This violoncello was at that time in the possession of Pigott, an Irish violoncellist resident in Dublin. The instrument had been brought from Spain by a wine merchant, who sold it for a very low price. Piatti fell in love with it directly he saw it, but the possessor did not think of selling it, nor could Piatti have bought it, as he had no money wherewith to do so, but the thought of that violoncello always hovered in his mind. A few years later Pigott died and the instrument was sent to London to a gentleman who wrote to Piatti asking him to go and see it, and to give his opinion on it. When he saw it he was again in despair at not having the means to buy it himself. He went to Maucotel an instrument maker and advised him to buy it, which he did for £300. Later on, General Oliver, one of



Piatti's best friends, wanted his opinion about a violoncello which had been sent to him with a view to his buying it; and Piatti saw his beloved Stradivarius again. Of course he advised the General strongly to buy it, and he did so for £350. Vuillaume of Paris went to see it, and offered at once £1,000, but General Oliver would not sell it. Piatti had the satisfaction of keeping it in order, and of playing it occasionally to the owner. One day he was thus playing and comparing it with other instruments in the possession of the General when he was asked which he thought the best of them: "Of course the Strad"; he said. Springing up from a chair, the General said: "Well, take it home, keep it, and enjoy playing on it." Piatti was quite paralyzed; but he felt that he could not take it away from the old General, so after expressing his gratitude he said he would not take it away at once, but would go there to play it to him as much as he could. The General would not have it

so, and the next day sent the instrument to Piatti with a most kind note.

Holl, the artist, hardly ever produced a finer portrait than that of Piatti with this violoncello which forms the frontispiece of this volume; but Piatti was wont to say of it "He did not do justice to the "bass."

After playing in Dublin the party had a concert at Belfast and then had to fulfil an engagement to play at Glasgow on the following night. The departure from Belfast was made by steamer to Greenock. They had a very bad voyage with the result that they only reached Glasgow an hour after the time fixed for the commencement of the concert. It was not pleasant to have to play under such circumstances, and after a bad voyage, a possible *contretemps* for which the manager of the tour apparently never made allowance. The party hurried off to the concert hall and found that the doors had been locked to prevent the people asking for the return of their

money, and that the benches were being broken up and a general disturbance was going on. The manager tried to explain matters, but could not get a hearing, and it was at last decided to try the effect of a trio. The public hissed all the time until at last a cantabile passage for the violoncello seemed, as Piatti afterwards said, to soothe them and changed the hisses into applause. In contrast with this a story may be told, of a trio performed on another tour by Pauer, Sainton and Piatti at St. Andrews. At the end of the first movement there was a little applause; at the end of the second movement less; and at the end of the third none; and when the audience saw the performers about to begin a fourth movement, they called out, "Oh, give us "a tune." Joachim, when playing at Cambridge on the occasion of a degree being conferred on the late Prince Consort, was interrupted in the middle of Mendelssohn's concerto by a cry of "Oh, "pray no more."

The financial result of the first visit to England however left Piatti without a penny and Madame Castellan, who had been singing at Herr Döhler's matinées at which Piatti had been playing, gave him £10 which was just enough to enable him to get to Milan.

After crossing the Channel he landed at Boulogne and there his passport was taken from him, and he was told that he would get it again at Paris. Wishing not to spend his money in Paris, his first act on reaching the capital was to book a place in the diligence which was to start for Turin on the night of his arrival. This done he applied for his passport, but his surprise may be imagined when he was told that it could not be issued until the following day, with the result that he had to submit to an unnecessary detention of twenty-four hours in Paris.

The long diligence journey southward passed without incident until they were approaching Chambéry when Piatti, thinking to take a short cut and to stretch

his legs, lost his way and missed the diligence. Presently he heard the sound of a conveyance on the road and when he was overtaken by it he asked the occupants for a lift. He was told by them that they had no room in the carriage but that he might get up on the shaft. As they went along Piatti recognized by his accent that a gentleman in the carriage was a Milanese. When they got to Chambéry the diligence had already started and there was nothing to be done but to remain there until the diligence of the following day arrived. The Milanese gentleman asked Piatti if he was not going to dine at the table d'hôte. Piatti said "No, I shall walk into the country and get some milk and cheese." The gentleman offered to accompany him. They reached a cottage where they had some food together, and Piatti was about to confide to his companion his money difficulties when that gentleman said "I have run short of money, will you lend me some?" Piatti explained that he was

in the same plight. They then found that, by combining their respective funds, there was just enough to enable one to reach Milan; so it was arranged that they should draw lots which should go on, on the understanding that the fortunate winner should, on arriving at Milan, send to the other the means to enable him also to proceed with his journey. The fortunate lot fell to the Milanese, and Piatti was left alone at Chambéry. Happily in due time the funds arrived and he got to his destination.

## CHAPTER V

## RUSSIAN TOUR.

Piatti's next foreign tour was to Russia, where he spent twelve months in 1844-45; his only visit to that country. There are two compositions which belong to the Russian period, the "Mazurka Sentimentale" (opus 6), of which Piatti himself said that there was nothing remarkable about it except that it was written in seven flats, and the "Air Baskyr" (opus 8), the subject of which used to be played by a man who was a Baskyr, that is a native of the confines of Asia, on a bagpipe under Piatti's windows in St. Petersburg. The Baskyr used to begin by filling his bag producing a note which descended chromatically as the bag filled.

In Russia Piatti played with Döhler,

the pianist with whom, it will be remembered, he had already played in London. Döhler, while in Russia, became engaged to a lady of noble family, Countess Scheremetief; but the lady being noble the Emperor would not allow the marriage to take place. Döhler was a native of Lucca, so he went off to his own country and got the Duke to make him a Baron and the marriage then took place.

On one occasion Piatti went to a public *séance* given by a mesmerist in Russia. It was suggested to Piatti that he should offer to be mesmerized. He sat down and the mesmerist tried for a quarter of an hour without any result. Piatti felt sorry for him and wishing to avoid a failure pretended to go to sleep, and he then heard the mesmerist say "It's all right, he is ready now." Young ladies were brought up to Piatti and they enquired about future marriages and received the most satisfactory answers. After this to give an exhibition of the power of thought transference through



the mind of a person in mesmeric sleep Piatti was asked the time. By opening his eyes to an imperceptible extent he was able to see a clock at the end of the hall, and his answer produced exclamations of "Wonderful, wonderful!" In the same way he was able to identify a gentleman who entered the room. The mesmerist then announced that he had complete control over his subject and could at any time make him do anything that he pleased. Some three or four years later the mesmerist called on Piatti in Paris and wanted to borrow from him a thousand francs. But his control was not sufficient to procure the loan.

Piatti was introduced by Panofka, the Russian composer, to Bordogni, who was a native of Bergamo, but whose talents were, according to Piatti, musical to the exclusion of all else. On one occasion he heard the Grand Duke Michael say to a lady, who handed him a cup of tea:—"Madame, cette tasse vous ressemble tout-à-fait." "Pourquoi,

“Monseigneur ?” “Parcequ’elle est  
“remplie de bon thé (bonté).” The laugh  
that followed this *calembour* made  
Bordogni feel that it was worth repeating  
and he took an early opportunity when a  
lady handed him a cup to say “Madame,  
“cette tasse vous ressemble tout-à-fait.”  
“Pourquoi, Monsieur ?” “Parcequ’elle  
“est remplie de bon café!” Bordogni  
was asked once “Pourquoi devez-vous  
“respecter la chicorée ?” Being unable  
to solve the riddle the answer was given  
him “Parcequ’elle est amère (ta mere).”  
He promptly asked a lady the same  
question and she being unable to answer  
was told “Parcequ’elle est votre mère.”

One outcome of the visit to Russia  
was the composition by Piatti of his  
“Fantaisie Russe,” which was however  
only produced in public for the first time  
at a concert of the Musical Union in 1860.

Piatti was detained in St. Petersburg  
longer than he had originally intended.  
The steamer used to leave but once a  
month ; and when Döhler and his

brother left there were only two vacant places and Piatti had to follow them later.

Piatti spent altogether about two years on tour with Döhler. On one occasion at Berlin he was to play at Court before King William I. When his turn to play came he looked at Döhler who said "I cannot play; there is the Court accompanist." Piatti was not unnaturally nervous at the idea of playing with a new accompanist without any rehearsal; he saw a little man coming forward who took his seat at the piano, but the performance went splendidly and, when Piatti asked who the accompanist was, he was told—"Meyerbeer."

## CHAPTER VI.

## SETTLED IN ENGLAND.

PIATTI's second visit to England was in 1846 and we find that he was at once engaged as a soloist in eight or nine concerts in London during the season, including Mrs. Anderson's Annual Concert.

The concert of the greatest importance to Piatti at which he played during this season was the Benefit Concert of the Director of the Musical Union at Willis's Rooms, as it was the first occasion on which he took part in public in a string quartet. At that time although the concerts of the Musical Union had ceased to be private meetings at the director's house, and were given in a public hall, yet they were so far private that only subscribers were admitted to the concerts.

An exception was however made in the case of the Director's Benefit Concert which was advertized in the papers and for which tickets were sold, and which was therefore a public concert in every sense of the word. Piatti played in a quartet by Mozart and in one movement of a quartet by Spohr.

He was again engaged to play in the orchestra at the Opera. He also played in Jullien's Concerts d'Été which were given in Covent Garden Theatre; and it is wonderful to think what Jullien's band must have been, when we know that at the same time there were playing among the first violins, Sainton, Ernst, Sivori and Vieuxtemps.

Verdi came to England in 1847 for the production at Her Majesty's Theatre of his Opera "I Masnadieri," which was written expressly for the English stage. The work did not prove a success, but it contained an incidental obbligato for the violoncello, the performance of which by Piatti was much applauded.

This is not the place to go into the operatic squabble which caused much excitement to the public and considerable discomfort and inconvenience to artists half a century ago. Suffice it to say that in the end all the existing orchestral arrangements fell through owing to the post of conductor at Covent Garden being taken by Sir Michael Costa with the understanding that the orchestra of Her Majesty's Theatre was to go to Covent Garden. However Lumley, having the management of Her Majesty's Theatre, engaged Balfe to form an orchestra for the Opera there, and Balfe, whose acquaintance with Piatti dated from the days when the orchestra at Bergamo was "*troppo basso*," secured him to lead the violoncellos, a post which he held for several seasons.

Piatti played also on one occasion at a concert and used his Amati violoncello which had been in the maker's hands and been altered, and had only come back into his possession on the morning

of the Concert.\* He played one of his own works "Une Prière" which, as he had frequently played it with success, he regarded as his *Cheval de bataille*. Servais, the violoncellist, had composed a "Souvenir de Spa" which he used constantly to play, and he once said to Piatti, "'Une prière' is your 'Souvenir de Spa.'" However at the concert in London the performance was a failure according to Piatti's own opinion.

It will be remembered that the work selected by Piatti for his first appearance at a Philharmonic Concert was a Fantasia by Kummer. Hellmesberger, who was a wit as well as a violinist, said of Servais and Kummer "Wenn ich Kummer spielen höre, thut es mir sehr weh (Servais); und wenn ich Servais spielen höre, macht es mir Kummer."

Besides playing at the Opera Piatti

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\* When recently Herr Kubelik played on a violin which had not been in his hands before the day of the Concert someone said "Such is the rash confidence of youth."

frequently played solos at the National Concerts which were given at Her Majesty's Theatre in the autumn of 1850 under the direction of Balfe.

He also played for some years with the Sacred Harmonic Society under Costa. Haydn's "Seasons" was produced by that Society in Exeter Hall on December 5th, 1851. It was the opening concert of the season and the following passage occurs in the review of the performance in the "Musical World":—"The only important change remarked in the orchestra was the substitution of Signor Piatti for Mr. Lindley, as principal violoncello. The 'father of the orchestra' may console himself, on retiring from public life, with the assurance that the place he has occupied with so much distinction for more than half a century will be worthily filled by his young and gifted successor now, beyond comparison, the first violoncellist in Europe."



The monster Concerts which were given in those days were fatiguing. A critic in the "Morning Post" writes "The tinkling of a pianoforte for four hours on a stretch becomes very wearisome."

With reference to such concerts a story was told by Piatti of an incident at one of Glover's monster concerts which used to be given at Drury Lane Theatre. These concerts began at two and continued till seven or even later. On one occasion it was arranged that Paque, on the violoncello, and Gilardoni, on the double bass, should play one of Corelli's Sonatas about the middle of the programme; when, however, the time for them to perform came, a lady said, "I must sing now if I am to sing at all, as I have to sing at the Opera to-night." Then another singer came forward with a similar excuse; until by degrees the Corelli performance was pushed off and off to the end of the concert, when the audience were possibly beginning to sigh for something a little

less classical. When Paque began a well known gigue by Corelli, someone in the gallery immediately struck up the then popular air, "A perfect cure" the first three notes and the rhythm of which are identical with the opening of the gigue, and this was presently taken up by the audience in the gallery generally. Gilardoni went off at once in a rage, but Paque continued playing, unconscious in the hubbub that Gilardoni had gone, till looking round and missing his companion, he also picked up his instrument and fled.

From 1846 onwards Piatti was constantly in London, and England gradually became a country as dear to him as Italy. Indeed he probably had more friends in England than in his native land. His setting of Tennyson's "Swallow, swallow" was the expression of his keen love for England, and under the blue skies of Italy, he often sighed for the haze and cloud and neutral tints of the north.

In the spring of 1847 Mendelssohn visited London for the last time, and a private matinée in his honour was given by the Beethoven Quartett Society on the 4th of May. The programme, entirely selected from the works of Mendelssohn, except that he himself played Beethoven's 32 variations, consisted of the Quartett in D opus 44, the Octett, in which Piatti played, the Trio in C Minor and Lieder ohne Worte. One who was present writes, after an interval of more than half a century, "It was a most memorable performance and made an impression never to be forgotten; Piatti played magnificently, Mendelssohn's playing created great enthusiasm; "Vieuxtemps was grand." Another musical event in London happened to occur on the evening of the same day, the début at Her Majesty's Theatre of Jenny Lind.

When the Beethoven Quartett Society gave a similar matinée in honour of Spohr, Piatti took the first violoncello

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part in the double quartett in E minor, which was of course led by the composer.

Sterndale Bennett, an enthusiastic admirer of Piatti, composed and dedicated to him a Sonata Duo in A minor for Pianoforte and Violoncello which was performed by them at a concert, although it had been only completed the same afternoon. The same work was performed by them again at the first Concert of the Quartett Association at Willis' Rooms on April 28th, 1852.

Another work composed for and dedicated to Piatti was Molique's Concerto for Violoncello and Orchestra which was first performed at a Philharmonic Concert on May 2nd, 1853. There is no more effective Concerto for the Violoncello with Orchestra, and it has been frequently played by Piatti in Germany. When the work was completed, Molique asked Piatti to come and try it, and a gentleman who was present says that though in manuscript and abounding in technical difficulties which would have stag-

gered any other performer, it presented no difficulty to Piatti, so that Molique afterwards said to a pupil, "Dat Piatti "is de debil, he play my concerto at "sight."

The critic of the "Musical World" writes of this performance at the Philharmonic Concert:—

"In Signor Piatti Herr Molique found "an executant capable of giving the best "effect to his concerto. Seldom has this "unrivalled player appeared to greater "advantage. His execution of the passages and *tours de force* was perfect, "while his tone and expression in the "cantabile phrases might have afforded a "useful lesson to any vocalist."

Sir Arthur Sullivan also wrote a violoncello concerto for Piatti which was produced at the Crystal Palace in 1866.

Piatti studied composition chiefly in England under Molique. They were great friends and had the highest admiration for each other. Molique had studied the violin at Munich under Rovelli a

cousin of Piatti's father. Rovelli was principal violin in the Court Orchestra at the time, but he was also fond of Bohemian society, so that Molique had sometimes to wait half the night for Rovelli to come home and give him a lesson.

Molique was very strict in his harmony and counterpoint. On one occasion Piatti defended a progression which he had written, saying, "But Meyerbeer has used it." "Meyerbeer" said Molique, "Meyerbeer must not be taken as an authority." On another occasion Piatti played a composition of his own in the presence of Regondi, who exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo!" "I like it not," said Molique.

Piatti was of opinion that Molique would have had many pupils in England, had he been better acquainted with English. Molique was once in a cab with a lady, who, being uncertain of the way, asked him to make enquiries from the cabman. Molique put his head out of

the window and said, \**“Who are we?”* The cabman answered, *“If you don’t know, I’m sure I don’t.”* On the other hand Molique told a story of his having been summoned on a jury and when the clerk of the Court called out, *“Mr. Mollike;”* *“I answer not,”* said Molique.

Piatti as a bachelor was in the habit of dining at a restaurant in Golden Square, where he used to meet Mazzini, Orsini and other Italian refugees. Strangely enough on the floor above Orsini, Prince Napoleon, afterwards Napoleon III., used to dine.

In 1856 Piatti was married at Woolchester near Stroud to Mary Ann Lucy Welsh, the only daughter of Mr. Thomas Welsh, a well known professor of singing. There were four children of this marriage, but one daughter only grew up. The marriage was not a happy one, and ended in a mutual arrangement to live separ-

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\* *“Wo”* in German means where, and *“wer”* means who.

ately. Madame Piatti died in Italy a few weeks after her husband.

On more than one occasion between 1861 and 1864 Piatti acted as one of the judges for the prizes given by the Society of British Musicians for string quintetts and took part in the performances of the successful works.

The action of the Philharmonic Society in inviting Signor Piatti to perform a work of his own composition at one of the Jubilee Concerts of the Society on Monday, July 14th, 1862, given under the direction of Sterndale Bennett, was a compliment of which any artist might well be proud. The whole of the seats for the Concert were taken before the end of the previous week. The work selected by Piatti was his "Thème varié" which is described by a critic as brilliant and well written and as having been received with the most flattering applause.

As Piatti, chiefly owing to his work in England, became more independent he felt that a small furnished house would



give him greater comfort than lodgings, and one day walking up Park Lane, he observed that the pseudo-gothic house, well known to all Londoners, which was for many years in the occupation of Sir Travers Twiss, was to be let. The situation seemed an agreeable one, and the house not too large. Piatti accordingly enquired what the rent was. It need hardly be added that he did not take the house.

Piatti at this time occupied rooms over a chemist's shop at the corner of Queen's Gardens. His father came to see him in England and arrived by sea at the London Docks. As he could not speak a word of English, his son had provided him with the address written on paper.

The paper however had been lost, so the father directed a cabman to drive him to "Cooen Garden" as an Italian, who did not know English, might attempt to pronounce Queen's Gardens. The cabman took him to Covent Garden.

Thence a police constable, not understanding what he wanted, conducted him to Bow Street, and sent across to the Opera House for an interpreter. Signor Monterasi, the prompter, who, as has been said, was a native of Bergamo, and who was probably the only person in London besides his own son to whom Antonio Piatti was known, came and was able immediately to send Piatti to his son's address. The father seemed to think it as natural that he should meet Signor Monterasi in London as in a small town like Bergamo.

While staying with his son, Antonio Piatti was in the habit of going out alone. His son wished him to take the precaution of having a card with the address on it, but this the elder Piatti refused saying that he knew how to ask to be directed to the house. One day he lost his way. He went up to a gentleman in the street and said "Chemist." The gentleman called a cab and said to the driver, "This gentleman must be ill, drive him to

"a chemist." The cabman drove to the door of the very chemist over whose shop Piatti lodged.

Once, on getting into an omnibus in London, Piatti by accident put the point of his umbrella close to the face of a passenger already seated in the omnibus. The latter was much annoyed, and paid no heed to the apologies of Piatti who, he said, had nearly put his eyes out. At last a third gentleman said to Piatti "Never mind, Sir, your hands are of much more value than his eyes."

Reference has been made to Piatti's acquaintance with Mazzini. On one occasion when travelling to the south Piatti, on reaching the Italian frontier, remembered that he had a volume of Mazzini's works in his possession. The discovery of such a book on an Italian at the time, which was before the accomplishment of the unification of Italy, would have led to his imprisonment, and he felt that the only thing to be done was to put a bold face on the matter.

He therefore opened the book and read it deliberately in the Custom House. The officers searched his luggage, but it did not occur to them to enquire into the nature of the work which was open under their eyes. Their action was not dissimilar from that of a London police constable who, during the dynamite scare in London, inspected a gentleman's bag at the Law Courts and passed it; the gentleman afterwards complained to a friend of the action of the constable and was told that the police had instructions to examine all packages to see that no dynamite was brought into a public building. "That is too amusing," was the reply, "My bag is full of dynamite, which I am taking into the country to blow up the roots of trees."

Piatti himself was indirectly connected with dynamite outrages in London. He found in a book shop an old and rare Italian volume which he purchased, and it struck him that the attendant in the shop did not know much about his

second-hand books or take much interest in them. On the following day Piatti received a visit from a detective officer from Scotland Yard. The attempt to blow up London Bridge had just taken place, and the second-hand book shop which Piatti had visited had been discovered to be but a screen for a dynamite store. The police authorities having found Piatti's address in the shop were anxious to ascertain if he could identify anyone whom he had seen there on the previous evening. It is to the credit of the Metropolitan police that the book shop had been so well watched and a visitor to it so quickly traced.

Piatti, who was a keen collector of old books, on another occasion went into a shop in Great Portland Street, and bought a quantity of old music. Turning over the pages, the shopman came on one piece which bore Hullah's signature, and said that he could not part with that as he collected autographs. Piatti assented and took the rest of the

music. Among the works which he so purchased he found an opera by Handel and in it two bars of accompaniment added to relieve the voice, in Handel's hand-writing, a far more valuable autograph than that of Hullah.

On another occasion he bought a sonata for the violoncello by Boccherini for two or three shillings at White's, a second-hand music shop in Oxford Street. He added an accompanient to it and played it in public. He afterwards went to White, who, as he had noticed, had another Boccherini sonata and asked the price of it. White demanded fifteen shillings. Piatti said, "But I bought 'one for two or three shillings' ". "Yes" replied White, "but you had not played 'it in public then!'"

A silver violin was for a long time exposed for sale in a shop at the corner of Leicester Square, and this as a curiosity had frequently attracted Piatti's attention. It was ultimately bought by Mario, and found to have but a mis-

erable tone; probably worse than the biscuit tin and piece of wood which may sometimes be seen in the hands of a street performer.

There was a viola by Stainer which Piatti had seen in Milan and at that time the owner was asking three thousand francs for it. A clever dealer in curiosities afterwards came to England with a collection of instruments to be sold and among others this viola, on which a reserve price of three hundred francs or £12 was put. The sale took place at Messrs. Puttick and Simpson's Auction Rooms, and when the viola was put up Piatti immediately bid 25 guineas for it and became the purchaser at that price. The dealer afterwards came to Piatti and told him that he was a ruined man, as he had made a mistake as to the reserve bid, which should have been not 300 but 3,000 francs. Piatti told him that the owner might cancel the sale and have the instrument back, but he heard no more of the matter. It was a not

uncommon practice to change the head of an instrument when it was done up; and this viola, instead of a scroll, bore a carved head which was certainly not by Stainer. Opening one of the side boxes in the case, Piatti found in it the original head. He subsequently sold the instrument in Berlin for £180; a handsome profit no doubt. But the viola had of course only been bought as an investment and we cannot grudge to an artist the profit which such a transaction represents.

The knowledge of a good instrument like any other knowledge is only gained by long and persevering study and there is no reason why the man, who has, by his industry and ability, acquired this knowledge, should not benefit thereby.

The artifices of concert givers are exposed in a story about a man named Calcraft, who was giving a concert at Exeter Hall, and advertised "Sivori will arrive expressly for this concert." Piatti happening to meet Sivori on the day of



the concert in London said, "You arrive late." Sivori did not understand what he meant, never having heard about the concert, so Sivori and Piatti went off to Exeter Hall together and heard Calcraft come forward and say, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry to say that Signor Sivori has failed to keep his engagement." Piatti wanted Sivori to show himself on the platform, but he would not do so.

Sivori although he had been many years in England had but little knowledge of the English language. At a concert at which he played, and at which Henry Russell, the composer of "Cheer, boys, cheer," sang, the latter was encored. Sivori was jealous of the applause given to the popular singer. The next morning in the "Times" there was a long report of a speech by Lord John Russell, and Sivori's friends teased him by handing him the paper saying, "You see the 'Times' only speaks of Russell."

The following is a story of graceful

tact on the part of Lady Benedict, now Mrs. Lawson. Lady Benedict asked Piatti to play at a party at her house and afterwards sent him a cheque for fifteen guineas. Piatti's fee at the time was twenty guineas, but of course he did not mention the fact. Later in the season Lady Benedict, having heard of her mistake, invited Piatti to dinner and asked him to bring his violoncello. It was quite a family party; but a day or two afterwards Piatti received a cheque for twenty-five guineas.

This is in happy contrast with the cases, now we may hope rare, in which artists have been invited to dinner and then asked to perform. Liszt on such an occasion struck a few notes on the pianoforte and then said to his hostess, "Madame, j'ai payé mon dîner." Chopin under similar circumstances said, "Madame, j'ai si peu dîné." But perhaps the happiest of all was the vocalist who said "I can dine or I can sing, but "I cannot do both."

Piatti experienced a peculiarity of the late Lord Dudley, who had such a prejudice against guineas that he preferred to pay twenty-five pounds to a fee of twenty guineas.

On one occasion Piatti was travelling to the north of England where he was to play at a private house. He had his instrument in the carriage with him, and got into conversation with a fellow traveller, an English nobleman, who asked him where he was going. Piatti told him the name of the station. "That is a small place," said the nobleman and then added, "but perhaps there is a fair there."

England was not the only country where Piatti passed unrecognized. He was at Brescia with Lord and Lady Battersea and was showing them the principal objects in the town when a local guide came up to him and said, "You are not from this place. I know Brescia and can show them everything and we will divide the fee."

At Arnheim, Piatti had to play a concerto with the orchestra in which there was a passage where a violoncello of the orchestra had to play in thirds with the solo instrument. At rehearsal the passage was out of tune. Piatti looked round, and, seeing that the orchestral player was smoking suggested that he should put down his cigar and that they should try the passage again. But the second attempt was no better than the first so Piatti said, "Never mind, I will play it in thirds myself." After rehearsal he was walking away when he was overtaken by the orchestral 'cellist who asked him for his photograph. Piatti said, "I have not one here, but if you will give me your address I will send it from London." The violoncellist handed him a visiting card on which was engraved, "Baron von Amerongen, Grand Chambellan de sa Majesté le roi." Piatti said "I am afraid that you must have thought me very rude at rehearsal, but I did not know that I was speaking

“to an amateur.” The Grand Chamberlain replied, “Oh ! I am much obliged to you ; they all pay me compliments here, “and I am grateful to you for telling me “the truth.”

At Newcastle Piatti went to the theatre to see a performance of “Don Pasquale.” To his surprise Thalberg appeared on the stage in the character of the notary. The actor who should have played the part had been taken ill.

Besides playing many times at the Philharmonic Concerts, Piatti played frequently at the Crystal Palace and at other orchestral concerts both in England and on the continent. Yet it is as a performer in chamber music that he will ever be best remembered.

After the Musical Union had been converted by Mr. John Ella, from a private association to a public society for giving concerts of chamber music, Piatti for several seasons occupied the post of principal violoncellist, the quartets being led by Sivori, Ernst, Vieuxtemps, Sainton,

Joachim and others. The meetings of the Musical Union were at first held in Willis' Rooms. When they were transferred to Saint James' Hall, the performers occupied seats in the middle of the room in the position recently adopted by the Joachim quartet.

It was for these concerts that Mr. Ella originated the publication of analytical programmes. These programmes were issued to subscribers before the concerts and thus gave them some useful information about the works which they were to hear. The Bach Choir made an attempt to recur to this practice but not with success. Life is now at too high a pressure, people attempt to read their books and to listen to music at the same time with the usual fate of those who try to do two things at once. In a proof of one of the Musical Union programmes, Piatti noticed a paragraph which began "This is perhaps one of the *least* interesting of Haydn's quartetts." Piatti said "You cannot print that, people will ask

“why the quartett is played.” There was not time to make much alteration in the proof, but when the programme was issued Piatti read, “This is perhaps one of the *most* interesting of Haydn’s quartetts.”

The Popular Concerts were established by Mr. Arthur Chappell in 1859; Piatti may almost be regarded as one of the promoters of that enterprise so keen was his interest in it, and until his final retirement he constantly held the post of violoncellist, the concerts at which he did not appear being few in number. Thus began his lifelong association with his dear friend Strauss and with Ries, whose connection with these concerts as second violin was as long as that of Piatti.

Through the Popular Concerts Piatti made many friends and acquaintances. Among the latter may be classed a violoncello player whose post is a responsible one though he has not risen to the top of his profession. The stage door from the hall occupied by the Christy Minstrels

opens on to the stairs leading from the artists' room at St. James' Hall. Piatti was descending the stairs one evening when this stage door opened and a man with his face blackened greeted him, "Ah ! you're Signor Piatti, the 'cello player of the Monday Pops. I'm the "principal 'cello player of the Christys."

The most important of Piatti's compositions, or at least the works which gave him the greatest pleasure in composition, were his sonatas for violoncello and pianoforte written for the Popular Concerts. The first sonata was written at Cadenabbia and was produced at these concerts on Monday January 5th. 1885 when it was performed by the composer and Madame Haas ; and Signor Piatti was recalled three times by a delighted audience. The work was repeated on Saturday February 28th.

At the last concert of the same season, on March 30th, 1855, Piatti produced his "Bergamasca." A critic explained that a Bergamasca was a dance resembling a



Saltarello having its origin at Bergamo. Piatti himself however when asked for an explanation of the name said, "I don't know, I found the word in a "dictionary." The rhythm which he has adopted is the rhythm of a country dance of the neighbourhood but the dance is not now known by the name of a Bergamasca.

The second sonata, in D, was written the following year while he was recovering from the injuries received in a serious accident which nearly cost him his life and which is mentioned later, and was produced at the opening of the concert on Monday April 4th, 1886 by the composer and Miss Agnes Zimmermann. The sonata consists of three movements, the last being an air with variations, all based on the same principal theme.

The third sonata was produced in 1889, the fourth in 1893, the fifth and sixth, which have never been published, in 1896.

Besides playing at these concerts, as everybody knows, the same quartet party habitually visited the principal towns in England. On one occasion as they went to their hotel at Nottingham, they saw a placard "Herbert Reeves will arrive" and below it in smaller type "Joachim, "the friend of Emperors and Kings. "Piatti the king of 'Cellists. Ries the "First of Second violins." Again they saw "Herbert Reeves will arrive." And finally "Herbert Reeves has arrived." When they reached their hotel they despatched a messenger to the organiser of the concert begging him to assure them if it was really the case that Mr. Herbert Reeves had arrived.

At one town visited in this way Piatti told the hotel porter to be careful of the violoncello case which he was taking off the omnibus as it contained a very valuable instrument. The porter said "Is it a Joseph?" "Better than that," said Piatti. "You don't mean to say it "is a Strad'," replied the porter.

On another tour the pet Strad' was very nearly the subject of what lawyers call "larceny by trick." After a concert, a gentleman carrying a violoncello case came into the room where Piatti was putting away his instrument. He placed the case near Piatti's and, producing a violoncello, for which he said he had given a good price which he could ill afford, begged Signor Piatti to give him his opinion of the instrument. Piatti was unwilling to do this, but, yielding to entreaty, examined the violoncello and then informed the purchaser that he had been thoroughly cheated as it was a very poor instrument. After some further conversation the gentleman left. A minute later an attendant ran into the room, calling out, "Quick, Mr. Piatti; that gentleman is putting your violoncello on to his cab." Piatti ran down just in time. There was a profusion of apologies for the mistake of cases, and the Strad' was saved.

During the last twenty years of his

residence in London, Piatti lived at No. 15, Northwick Terrace. The care taken by his landlady, Miss Freeman, of his property is exemplified in another Strad' adventure. One evening a man drove up to her door in haste, saying that a gentleman, whom Miss Freeman knew to be an intimate friend with whom Piatti frequently played, was in a great dilemma, as he had friends with him who wished to have music but he had no violoncello, and that he would be most grateful to Signor Piatti if he would lend his instrument for a few hours ; the greatest care should be taken of it. Miss Freeman however did not fall into the trap.

Of Miss Freeman's solicitude for himself Piatti was ever mindful ; and a legacy to her in his will was accompanied with the words, " In token of gratitude for the " attention shown to me during my stay " in her house."

## CHAPTER VII.

## CADENABBIA.

EVERY visitor to Italy is familiar with the beauty of Lake Como, the shores of which have been called the garden of Italy, and particularly with the collection of villas, chiefly built for the English, in the neighbourhood of Tremezzo, which is known as Cadenabbia from the Italian village on the hills above the lake.

Here in 1868 Piatti purchased a small villa by the side of the lake which has been since known as the Villa Piatti and to this pleasant spot he would retire after the steady work of the musical season in London. There he was sure, especially among the English visitors, to meet with many friends, and there was no more genial companion or better

guide along the paths, which stretch up the hills on both sides of the lake, than the simple, liberal-minded artist, with his large fund of general information derived from extensive travel with a power of close observation, and from wide reading with the gift of an excellent memory.

It is said that during the Napoleonic wars a party of cavalry once endeavoured to effect a retreat along one of the steep paths on the northern side of the Colico arm of the lake, but the story has been doubted on the ground that no cavalry could attempt such a route. Piatti was once walking on this path when he saw a plant, the flower of which interested him and he proceeded to dig it up with his umbrella. The point of the umbrella struck something hard. Piatti dug on and up came the eagle of a cavalry helmet.

The interior of the Villa Piatti is an ideal residence for an artist. The principal living rooms are on the ground floor looking on to the lake, but the owner's private library was at the back

of the house on the upper floor; the steep ascent of the ground, however, enabled him to have direct access on the level to his garden.

Piatti had always been a keen collector of rare books, especially in England, and any one entering his library would have thought that the collection was that of a man of leisure who had reaped the full benefit of an early literary education, rather than that of a poor artist who had commenced the struggle of life as a mere child.

In the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony there is an episode distinctly suggestive of military music, with a part for an instrument called in the score "Cinelli," which is always played on cymbals. One day Piatti took down the score of this symphony in his library, saying, "I wonder what instrument Beethoven meant by the 'word 'Cinelli.' There is no such word "in the Italian language, and I think "that he meant the bells which were

“carried in military bands and which “were called ‘Chinese bells.\*’” The usual word in German for cymbals at the present day is “Becken,” but that name did not come into use until long after Beethoven’s death. In Vienna there was and still is a local name, “Cinellen,” which is not to be found in ordinary dictionaries. “Cinelli” may be an Italianized form of the popular Viennese word, but, as Chinese bells were not discarded from military bands until twenty years after Beethoven’s death, Piatti’s suggestion was so far interesting that he was asked to put it in writing. He wrote the following particulars ;—“ Signor Gemalli, “a traveller of the sixteenth century, “speaks of a Chinese instrument with bells “in a festive entrance of the King. Might “the name have been corrupted in “‘ Cinelli ’? When a boy I remember

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\* These bells are described in Grove’s Dictionary of Music, I. 346, under the title “Chinese Pavilion, Chinese Crescent, Chapeau Chinois.”



“in the orchestra something called  
“ ‘Campanelli Cinesi,’ a long stick with  
“bells, played by shaking it, which I  
“think is what Beethoven means in the  
“Ninth Symphony, and very appropriate.  
“ ‘Cinelli’ is not in any dictionary,  
“cymbals being called ‘Piatti.’ ”

The villa was also adorned with a small but choice collection of paintings including an interesting picture of the piazza which forms the centre of the city of Bergamo, and a portrait of Charles I. attributed to Vandyke, which Piatti's keen eye discovered in a dealer's shop at Como.

After Piatti had been settled for some years on the shore of the lake, a concert was given in the town of Como in support of an important charity, at which he played. Just before he went on to the platform a telegram was put into his hand. He said, “I cannot open it now,” and went up the steps and played. Then he opened his telegram. It was to announce that he had been made a Cavaliere of the order of the Crown of Italy.

Piatti's daughter, Rosa, who was his life long companion, was married in 1875 to Count Carlo Lochis, a member of an old Bergamo family, who for many years represented the district in the Italian Parliament. The family estate of the Count is at Crocetta di Mozzo, about four miles from Bergamo, and there was no more welcome guest in the house than his father-in-law, for whom he had great affection. Piatti's skill in collecting had such an inspiring effect on the Count, that after his marriage he became himself a keen bibliophil.

In 1885 Piatti with his daughter were travelling from Cadenabbia to Crocetta. They were met after dark at the railway station at Ponte San Pietro by the Count in his carriage. A new road has since been made from the station, but at that time there was a very sharp turn in the road at the foot of a hill between the station and the town. Unfortunately the horse was frightened and, the coachman losing control, the carriage was

overturned at this corner. The Count had concussion of the brain and lay for many days between life and death; Piatti's bow arm was broken below the shoulder and his head was severely cut; and the Contessa, who fortunately escaped without serious injury, had for weeks to move between the sick rooms of her husband and her father concealing from each the condition of the other.

When Piatti was able to rise from his bed he attempted to play the violoncello and, finding his right arm powerless, burst into tears. In time however, the strength returned, and many will remember the applause which greeted him in St. James Hall, when after nearly a year's absence he was able to resume his accustomed seat at the Popular Concerts on Monday, March 8th, 1886. The following account of his return is taken from the Musical Times under the heading of "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts."

"Monday was a red letter day in the

“calendar of the undertaking. The public  
“had almost ceased to hope for the return  
“of Signor Piatti this season, and the announcement of his reappearance was  
“therefore doubly welcome. Need it be  
“said that he was greeted with vociferous  
“cheering and applause again and again  
“renewed. The demonstration was at  
“once a testimony to his artistic worth  
“and a tribute of sympathy and congratulation. It would have been painful had  
“Signor Piatti’s career been cut short by  
“his unfortunate accident, and his complete restoration to health and resumption of his old position remove all cause  
“for anxiety on that score, more especially  
“as no trace of ill effects was observable in  
“his playing either in Mozart’s Quintett  
“in G Minor or Veracini’s Largo and  
“Allegro in F for violoncello. In execution, phrasing and expression, Signor  
“Piatti is still without a rival on his  
“instrument.”

In the summer of 1892 a visit was paid to Milan by Piatti and his daughter,

and the following account of an evening with Verdi is taken from a letter written by the latter.

“While dining at our hotel we heard  
“that Rubinstein was in Milan, at the  
“Hotel de la Ville, so directly after dinner  
“my father proposed that we should go to  
“see him and we did so. Rubinstein was  
“delighted to see my father again, and  
“asked us to dine with him the next day.  
“While talking and drinking a cup of  
“coffee, Rubinstein said he heard that  
“Verdi was in Milan and that he would  
“like to go and see him, so my father, who  
“knew Verdi, asked if he should go with  
“him. Of course Rubinstein accepted  
“the offer, and the next day we all went  
“together to call on Verdi. During our  
“visit I saw Verdi take my father by the  
“shoulder and go out on to the balcony  
“and speak to him. When they returned  
“into the room my father asked Rubinstein  
“if he would play something for Verdi.  
“Rubinstein said, ‘certainly, but I think  
“‘we ought to play something for the

“ ‘cello, and I should like to play one of  
“ ‘my sonatas with you, to Verdi.’ My  
“ father had no ‘cello in Milan, but Count  
“ Melzi, who has an instrument, was  
“ asked to lend it to my father and he did  
“ so, and, a ‘cello having been found, Verdi  
“ and his wife invited us all for the next  
“ evening. It was a most delightful even-  
“ ing and one never to be forgotten.  
“ Verdi was charming. Stolz was there  
“ and also Boito. I was sitting opposite  
“ Verdi while Rubinstein and my father  
“ were playing, and it was a picture to see  
“ the changes in Verdi’s face, and during  
“ the last movement unconsciously he got  
“ up from his chair and tears were running  
“ down his face ; but, as they played the  
“ last chord, he again sat down in the same  
“ position as before and no one who had  
“ not watched him would have thought  
“ that he had moved from his place or  
“ displayed any sign of feeling such as to  
“ cause tears. When we were about to  
“ leave, as I went to shake hands with  
“ Verdi, I thanked him for having invited

•

"*me* also, to spend such a delightful evening. He stopped me short putting his "hand before my mouth, and said, 'You "thank *me*? It is I who have to thank "you for bringing your father, Alfredo "Piatti, to play to me.' And thus "ended a delightful evening."

Piatti's final retirement from active professional life practically took place at the end of the season of Popular Concerts in 1898. He was seriously ill before he left England and his parting with many friends was a great trial to him. Among those to whom he had to say farewell was his favourite collie dog "Pop," who died a few months later. His daughter accompanied him back to Italy and there his remaining years were spent, partly at Cadenabbia and partly at his daughter's residence near Bergamo, his health not allowing him to revisit England.

In the autumn of 1898, under the auspices of Piatti, who had happily recovered his health, a Musical Festival,

at which Joachim and other great artists assisted, was organised at Bergamo to commemorate the centenary of the birth there of Donizetti. A statue of the composer was unveiled on the occasion. The late King of Italy took the opportunity to confer on Piatti, who was, as has been said, already a Cavaliere of the Italian order of the Crown of Italy, the rank of Commendatore della Corona d'Italia with the medal, one of the highest honours that he could receive.

In March 1899, Piatti's son-in-law, Count Lochis died, after only a few days illness, leaving two children, Margherita and Alfredo, named after his grandfather.

Adjoining the Casa Lochis at Crocetta is a glazed verandah, where the family commonly breakfast and which was Piatti's favourite resort in cold weather. The high road from Bergamo to the west is visible from this verandah. One day, in February 1901, Piatti saw a body of Italian troops marching along this road. "That sight," he exclaimed,



"sends a thrill through my heart. How often have I seen Austrian troops on that road."

Up to within a few weeks of his death Piatti would now and again take his violoncello, not the Strad' which had been left at Cadenabbia, out of its case and play to his own satisfaction and to the unbounded pleasure of his friends; but from the summer of 1900, it was clear that age was rapidly telling upon him; and his small form seemed to be gradually fading away. He suffered from failure of heart action and each attack left him a step lower. He still delighted in the society of his friends, and not long before his death enjoyed a visit from Boito, who came to see him at his daughter's house where he had been since the previous autumn. At the beginning of July he could no longer go out into the garden, but dressing with his daughter's aid would get to a sofa downstairs. Finally this exertion was too much for the body though his mental

power never left him. His last words were an affectionate blessing to his daughter, and he passed quietly away, holding her hand, shortly before midnight on Thursday the 18th July 1901.

Though the last months of the simple minded artist had been passed in the peaceful surroundings of his immediate family, after death, art claimed the right to honour her son. The professors and students of the school of music at Bergamo kept solemn watch by the body till it was finally borne from the house covered with wreaths to its last resting place in the private chapel of the Lochis family; and at the funeral four of the professors played the Andante from Schubert's Quartet in D minor, which is based on the air "Der Tod und das Mädchen"; Piatti having once expressed a wish that if any music were played at his funeral it should be that.

The funeral, on Monday, July 22nd, was a public one and was attended by the Prefect; by members of parliament,

and a deputation from the province; by the Mayor and municipality of the city of Bergamo; by representatives of the leading Musical Societies; and, touching tribute, by four of the boatmen of Cadenabbia, who insisted on coming on their own account. Hundreds of people from Bergamo and the surrounding district were present notwithstanding the tempestuous weather which prevailed. After the service in the parish church of Mozzo, the interment took place in the private chapel of the Lochis family, in the grounds of the house where the artist's last days had been spent.

A week later the professors of the school again visited the chapel; again they played the Schubert Quartet. Then joining hands they made a compact to play in the chapel in his memory annually on the anniversary of his death.

Piatti's compositions were essentially the works of one who was master of the instrument for which he wrote and who was also endowed with an Italian's

fluency of melody. They include, besides some thirty smaller works for Violoncello and Pianoforte and songs with Violoncello obbligato, a Concertino, two Concertos composed for the Crystal Palace, and a Fantasia Romantica, written for the Hallé Concerts at Birmingham, all with orchestral accompaniments. Reference has already been made to his six Sonatas for the Violoncello and Pianoforte; he also wrote a Serenata for two Violoncellos. His last composition, finished on the last day of the year 1900, was a "Danza Moresca" for the Violoncello with accompaniment for the Pianoforte which he played with all his wonted brilliancy to a party of friends at his daughter's house on New Year's Day 1901.

Besides his original works, he has conferred a lasting benefit on all violoncellists by his editions of old music, the natural result of his genius for collecting everything of artistic or literary value, and forming the commencement of a

library of high class music for the instrument which has been sadly needed hitherto. Amongst many other works which owe to Piatti a second life after more than two centuries of oblivion are some Variations by Simpson with figured bass, which he found by chance in the house of an English friend with whom he was staying, Sonatas by Locatelli, Veracini and Porpora, and six Lezioni by Attilio Ariosti, written originally for the Viola d'Amore, a work the editing of which for the Violoncello demanded much patience and study.

There probably never lived a better judge not only of violoncellos but also of violins than Piatti; he would spend many hours over an instrument adjusting the sound post, the bridge, the strings, to suit it. His opinion as to the alteration of pitch which has long been a serious question in England is therefore of value. He was not opposed to the lowering of the pitch, but he was strongly opposed to the uncertainty of two pitches.

Both in Italy and in England the violins of the great old masters, though originally made for a lower pitch than that now or recently in use, have been adjusted to the higher pitch by having suitable bars, sound posts, bridges and strings applied to them. "If the pitch is to be lowered," he said, "all these must be altered before you can get the true tone of the instrument."

Finally as a master of his instrument there can be but one opinion, that Piatti was the greatest. All living violoncellists have sat at his feet, Hausmann, Becker, Whitehouse, Ludwig, Stern—all. Just as Joachim has, directly or indirectly, taught every violinist of the present day, so has Piatti, especially in England, taught every violoncellist. As an illustration of his mastery of technique it may be mentioned that after his retirement, he would amuse himself by playing the solo part of Beethoven's violin concerto on the violoncello; but he was so averse to display that only a

few had any conception of his astounding power and facility. An English amateur, an oculist by profession and a close observer, said that, knowing where difficult passages occurred, it always interested him to observe the indication of the approaching difficulty in the manner of the performer, but that no such symptom could ever be detected in Piatti; on the contrary the more difficult the passage the easier he made it appear. Combined with his wonderful execution Piatti possessed even a greater gift, essential in cantabile playing and yet most difficult of attainment, the power of making the softest note travel.

Probably no feature of Piatti's character was more marked than his indefatigable earnestness, a quality essential to success in any career. Without this he could never have struggled on against all the difficulties and disappointments of his early life. Whatever he undertook he determined to carry through successfully.

He had an Englishman's love of games;

and, although lawn tennis only came into fashion at a time when he had lost the vigour of youth, his skill in placing his balls made him no mean adversary. He was very fond of card tricks ; and a passable player at whist though he never got so far as bridge. At the same time he had a great dislike of gambling ; he said " I see no pleasure in winning my friend's money, or in losing my own."

His lovable disposition has been well described by a fellow artist who wrote after his death " He had the faculty of " making real friends for himself. I had " an affectionate regard for the *man* as well " as an unbounded admiration for the " *artist*."

This sketch of one who was honoured, and admired by all, and whom to know intimately was to love, may be fittingly closed with the words of a life long English friend. " There is one feature " in Piatti's character to which I can " well testify after my long friendship of " over half a century. I cannot remember



“any occasion on which he spoke un-  
“kindly of a brother artist. If he did  
“not like them, he said nothing ; on the  
“other hand nobody could have been  
“more ready to appreciate their merits.  
“He was most kind to artists in distress  
“and was often fleeced through untrue  
“statements by undeserving persons.”

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